
Clinical Trial of Hope at Stanford -- guest blogger Roman Reed

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Under the direction of Dr. Gary Steinberg, an advance long considered impossible is moving forward today: Stanford announced yesterday that it will participate in Geron's human clinical safety trials for a novel treatment for spinal cord injury. These are safety trials to be sure and not efficacy trials, more tests will need to be run, but this is already farther along than ever before.

To understand what this means to me, jump back in timeâ€

Eight years ago, I held in my hand a paralyzed rat.

As I sat there in a wheelchair paralyzed from a spinal cord injury, holding this rat in wonderment, awe and jealousy, my mind barely comprehended that this rat was actually moving. His formerly paralyzed legs pushed strongly against my hands, trying to get away from my grasp. His coat full and healthy, meaning he had no pain. This rat was the tangible realization of a seemingly impossible dream: to cure paralysis.

This was the pioneer rat of what would become the world's first human embryonic stem cell clinical trials: the "Geron Trials".

That rat walked because of Dr. Hans Keirstead at the University of California, Irvine Reeve-Irvine Research Center, whose brilliance is matched only by his courage and determination. Nearly everyone denied him funding initially, because his experiment was "too far reaching". But he would not quit.

This rat was also walking again, because California's Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act of 1999 provided Keirstead the initial funding for this Pioneering Research! (CIRM has since funded Keirstead's follow-up research with a Comprehensive award.)

The first human clinical trials for hESCR treatment were accomplished because of Geron Corp. Geron is literally footing the bill: risking their financial backbone to advance the field. It is to be hoped they will be richly rewarded for such fiscal courage.

These trials of hope through stem cells are being overseen by Stanford's brilliant Dr. Gary Steinberg and Dr. Steve McKenna of San Jose Valley Medical Center.

Stanford is committed to the cause of cure; and there too, I can speak from personal experience-because Dr. Steinberg is the founder and director of the Stanford Partnership for Spinal Cord Injury and Repair.

One day, I hope to fulfill the late great Christopher "Superman" Reeve's prediction, that:

"One day, Roman and I will stand up from our wheelchairs, and walk away from them forever."

Cure did not come in time for our great champion, but I believe he is smiling down on us this day, as Stanford, California, and the world take one leap toward the fulfillment of his dream.

Be mindful, this is just the beginningâ€

- Roman Reed is the namesake of the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act passed in California. As a result, more than \$12.5 million in state funds has been awarded to scientists conducting research in spinal cord regeneration. An additional \$50 million has been leveraged from outside sources.

Here is additional information about CIRM's spinal cord injury funding.

Tags: University of California Irvine, Roman Reed, Stanford University, steinberg, Keirstead, spinal cord injury

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